

CULTURE BURSTING OUT ALL OVER ON RAPANUI 2001 – 2002

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Rapanui (Easter Island and similar in European languages) is the oldest human settlement of the vertices of the so-called "Polynesian Triangle", Hawai'i and Aotearoa (New Zealand) receiving their human populations later. Since 1888, Rapanui (Chilean spelling, Rapa Nui) has been part of Chile. Today, the single island (plus uninhabited Sálas y Gómez) comprises the Province of Easter Island, in the Fifth Region of Chile. The Governor, Enrique PAKARATI Ika epakarati@interior.gov.cl, is nominated by and represents the President of Chile. The Mayor, Petero EDMUNDS Paoa munirapa@entelchile.net, is elected by popular vote and represents his constituency.

Those are the bare facts – the official word, as it were. But, it is not for those bits and pieces that the island is known. It is the extraordinary megalithic culture with its impressive constructions that demands attention and for which the island – or, rather, its National Park, was named a World Heritage Site at the 19th Session of the World Heritage Council, in December 1995. In 2000, around 20,000 tourists arrived to tour restored and ruined temple platforms (*ahu*), marvel at the Rano Raraku statue quarry and stare in disbelief at the restored ruins of 'Orongo, from where brave Rapanui young men scrambled down a sheer cliff face, swam shark-infested strong currents, to find an egg and to become the king of the island for a year. Or, at least, to present such an offering to their patron to assume that role.

The portrayal of this in the Kevin Costner produced eco-drama, *Rapa Nui*, is worth the price of the video alone. In fact, as its box office failure demonstrated, it is probably its only fine moment!

Most people when they find out that I am a social anthropologist who digs in the past and not an archaeologist who digs in the ground, are surprised. After all, in the travel posters and even much of the other popular literature about Rapanui, one rarely sees living people, but stone carvings. The last 'Orongo ceremony took place in the 19th century and no one traditionally has carved a *moai* since, probably, the 14th century. So what do I have to study?

Rapanui today is as bursting with cultural activity in the twenty-first century as it was at any time throughout the nearly two millennia that people have lived here. The current population of between 3,500 and 5,000, depending upon with whom one speaks and the time of the year, manages a whirlwind of intellectual and cultural activity that were it projected to a larger population would make it one of the most remarkable places on the planet, the casual visitor touching but the surface of all that is happening on this 55 square mile (166 ha²) most eastern point of the Polynesian triangle.

To be sure not a small amount of this is connected to tourist activity, but, as the television infomercials say, there is more!

Recently, I had occasion for the first time in the thirty

years that I have been studying Rapanui to compare the Heiva of French Polynesia with the Tapati Rapanui, and it is interesting how the two are related.

The Heiva is an ancient and really pagan celebration of the southern hemisphere solstice, marked in varying degrees by many Pacific places. Missionaries disapproved of the practice and discouraged it. But, fortunately for the people of French Polynesia, France has as its National Day the 14th of July and that was as good as any excuse to Heiva once again. In a cultural mix, the first modern name for Heiva was *Tiura'i*, which is a Tahitian rendering of the English July! So, the French had their parade, and the Polynesians, or *Ma'ohi*, as they prefer to be called today, could have their community competitions as they had always had and the French their marching bands: a good arrangement, with a quiet growl from the missionaries in the background.

But, Heiva took over *Tiura'i* when on 29 June – what a coincidence! – French Polynesia was granted internal autonomy 17 years ago (at 2001). Along with the main celebration in Pape'ete, there are Heiva celebrated throughout French Polynesia, most notably in Bora-Bora (or Pora-Pora, as they prefer). These celebrations also coincide with the annual school summer break. Summer break? Well, you see, French Polynesia is an integrated part of France and the official calendar is northern hemisphere, so school runs throughout the sweltering austral summer, but breaks from late June to early September, August being the quiet month, both in Pape'ete and Paris!

The Heiva does have a few public events, but mostly it consists of around a month of performances for which an entry charge is made. The minimum size for a performing group in 2001 was 80 persons, so smaller islands sometimes must combine a couple of church choirs for the singing events. The dances are spectacular events, with legends and myths jostling with contemporary tourism inspired performances clustered around the weekends. There is an artisan village just outside Pape'ete in Pirae in 2001, featuring craft from the entire territory. Impressive? Of course, but keep in mind that French Polynesia has around 230,000 people.

Rapanui, with a little over one percent of that number of people, puts on almost constant performances and events for (in 2001) for ten days; for 2002, the projected dates are 1-9 February, although Petero Edmunds, whose office is responsible for the event, admits that he has no idea how he is going to be able to finance the event next year.

The Tapati Rapanui, once a year, also takes place out of school time and when the island is bulging with visiting Rapanui, from university students studying in Chile to Islanders who have married outsiders and live far-flung in the Americas and Europe. It merits a study on its own as, in fact, so does Heiva.



Incidentally, Florencia Atamu, who was one of the first town counselors nominated by the Chilean government in 1966, claims that she suggested the idea of a Tapati Rapanui after having seen a Tiura'i, as it would have been then, in Tahiti when she went there on one of the first LanChile flights in 1969.

What I want to look at in this note is the on-going intellectual and cultural life of the island that takes place throughout the year, sometimes experienced by the visitor, other times taking place in the background and part of everyday Rapanui life.

EDUCATION

Rapanui has one multi-purpose educational establishment: Liceo Escuela Lorenzo Baeza Vega, established in 1938, but given its present functions from 1987. Just over 1,000 students are enrolled at various levels, sessions are split between morning, afternoon and evening. As a "Liceo", Lorenzo Baeza offers K-12 education and some adult instruction in literacy and other courses from time to time. Nancy and Robert Weber, of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, have researched the Rapanui language and provided instructional materials, in association with Chilean institutions, for the teaching of Rapanui. An important part of the Liceo is the Department of Rapanui Language & Culture. A core strategy of the Liceo is the concept of "Inter-cultural Bilingual Education" along with total emersion classes in primary grades.

From 8 am to 9 pm, there is always something going on at the school throughout the week and often on weekends. The rooms are used for adult education and short-term courses, some from Chile, with others being developed locally. PRODEMO is a Chilean government institution that offers instruction and assistance especially to women and they operate both in their own converted caravan (trailer/office) and at the school. Finally, there is the "Red Cross" building near the hospital that is the site of short-term courses of various sorts. A short while ago, there was a course on silk screening; more recently, one on how to put together "*proyectos*", formal requests for money from government institutions.

The Liceo does have Internet connection, with Jorge Hotu as technical adviser. They hope to expand their presence into cyberspace. The school and public library are now in the one building and records are slowly being put into a computer database. One of the surprises for a researcher such as myself is that the "Rongo-Rongo" Public Library has an extensive collection of photocopied press cuttings from Chile going back over 50 years, with most of the historical reference books on the island copied there as well. This is thanks to financing by the Municipality and the research efforts of librarian Imelda Hey.

The Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert (MAPSE) is a repository for cultural remains from a variety of researches on the island, most especially archaeological. MAPSE has collections and a specialist library. Associated with this institution is the Mulloy Library, named for an American archaeologist who worked on the island for many years and who was responsible for restoring most of its ancient remains, as most reading *RNJ* will know. Whilst fixed dates are not a part of normal custom in Chilean dominated Rapanui, the opening of the Mulloy Library in a renovated building of the Museum was to take place in August 2001. At least that was the plan.

SCIENCE

For nearly twenty-five years, the University of Chile's Institute of Easter Island Studies has maintained a presence on the island. This Institute has carried out archaeological and anthropological research on a variety of topics, although their publications are of limited distribution. At the moment, there is no activity, but a house is maintained near the center of the main settlement. Associates of the Institute visit the island from time to time for commercial (tour reception) and research purposes. The Institute maintains a presence in Santiago, with archives available there for researchers.

The Aeronautics Authority of Chile conducts weather research, principally for the Mataverí International Airport, under its care. Reports with limited distribution have been produced on weather trends on the island.

The Scripps Institute of the University of California conducts occasional research in collaboration with local associates from time to time, but has no physical presence on the island. The Rapa Nui National Park is operated by CONAF, the Chilean National Forestry Commission and has conducted research on culturally important plants, including an unsuccessful attempt to introduce the now extinct (on the island) *Toromiro*. The Chilean wine palm experiment still is in progress. It was this park that was declared a World Heritage Site in 1996 and not the entire Island, as some people think. Just to confuse matters, the original declaration of the National Park on 16 January 1935 applied to the entire island, and pointedly came out of the disgust by Chilean authorities for the objects removed by the Franco-Belgian Expedition a fortnight before. Later on that same year, Chilean President Alessandri signed a law, making the whole of Easter Island an Historical Monument. I can't finish this section without also mentioning that in that same year Hernán Cornejo, who was the Naval Sub-Delegate ("Governor") contracted Pedro Atan to make a full inventory of "all stone monuments" on the island "placing on the right side their number in order with white paint (6 cm)". For this service, often attributed to Father Sebastián, Atan was paid 3 beef cattle, "two hundred pesos in gifts" at the next supply ship's visit and "rations of meat, flour, sugar, tea, coffee, etc" for the three months that the work was to take. 688 numbers were painted in what Governor Cornejo called "this definitive work" (see Vergara 1939:240-254).

I mention that detail since the detractors of Father Sebastián who have written about the place (such as the frequently re-published late Francis Maziere, for example) blame the linguist priest for this defacing of the island's monuments. It was not a zealous priest researcher who is to blame for the painted numbers, some visible today since Cornejo specified oil based paint, but the orderly military mind of a minor Chilean government functionary who directed such an unattractive method of inventory.

SASIPA is a semi-government institution responsible for the majority of the land on the island (remnants of the former sheep ranch), providing water and electricity to the population but also conducting experiments in fisheries, agriculture and animal husbandry from time to time. These experiments are displayed in their Annual Report and on a website.

CULTURE

The Provincial Governor's office currently lists 24 community and cultural groups with various levels of activities, and the list increases every day as Rapanui explore new ways of satisfying their ancient competitive urges. From one point of view – it is the most obvious one – the increasing size and complexity of the ancient monuments and the associated *moai* was a feature of local group competition for status. Instead of keeping up with the Jones's, it is the Tupahotu's keeping up with the Ngaure's (names of traditional *mata* or clans). To raise a monument to the power and glory of one's ancestor is at the same time to proclaim one's own power and glory. For a thousand years of settlement, that status competition kept the peace on Rapanui and provides the overwhelming source of livelihood for today's Islanders, a fact which they all freely admit.

"Cultural politics", taken today as competition between Polynesian and Chilean ways of doing things, is as old as the human settlement of Easter Island.

CHURCHES

Churches are a central part of Rapanui culture, the oldest one being the Catholic church, the Parish of the Holy Cross, founded by Lay Brother Eugenio Eyraud in 1864. More recently there are others: Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventist and "Interdenominational". Even those who do not attend a church service will talk about what others might take as religious topics: the destiny of the soul, why people are as they are, if there is a God and so on. Such talk is not taken as being "religious", but normal discourse. Some will provide doctrinaire answers to these abiding human concerns, but most are happy to discuss and debate various possibilities, with or without an open bottle of Pisco (Chilean brandy) nearby. Even those whose religious sensibilities are enriched by traditions far distant from the island, are interested in talking about such topics, instead of football, instead of the gossip of movie stars, these latter being accessible through the daily satellite feeds of radio and television from government stations in Santiago.

The spirituality that one finds on Rapanui is not missionary inspired; it derives from the much older Polynesian tradition of venerating land and ancestor. In Polynesian languages, "*kainga*" – the place one eats, it is understood, as a group – is one's homeland and "*henua*" is one's own personal part of the world at the same time being the placenta, the navel and the "land".

Currently, and from different quarters, there is a plan to hire people who can claim descent from a particular ancient group and its associated land to live on and care for that same plot right around the island. Whether this radical proposal to break out of the confines of Hangaroa and Moeroa will be accepted by Chilean authorities or not is unknown still, but it seems the most natural thing to do for many Rapanui.

Te Mau Hatu, commonly known in Spanish as the "Consejo de Ancianos" is a comprehensive cultural organization that traces its roots to pre-Chilean social forms. Since its re-emergence in the 1970s, Te Mau Hatu has produced books on the history of Rapanui land and legal situation (1988), a documented history of the place since European contact (1994), a

grammar of Rapanui (1996), a Catholic ritual manual and, in 2000, a Rapanui-Spanish dictionary. This multi-active group has been responsible for political action, cultural preservation and educational activities of various sorts. A core activity at present is their "Commission for the Structuration of the Rapanui Language". Whilst not formally recognized in law, Te Mau Hatu is accepted by the Chilean government in practice. The group's President, Alberto Hotu, sits on many government committees and is widely consulted, especially by the current government of Chilean President Ricardo Lagos.

Early in the 1990s, a dissident group formed, called variously "Council N° 2" and the "Parallel Council". According to leading members of that group, the point of conflict was that Te Mau Hatu had become too close to Chilean power and was, therefore, compromised, the land question – who owns Easter Island – being a central, sticking point. Responding to demands, an election for the head of Te Mau Hatu was organized by the Chilean government department of Indigenous affairs, CON-ADI, with the vote on 13 April 1999 being in favor of Hotu. The people around the group that lost in this election are more active in political than cultural affairs, it must be said.

Other groups of a similar kind have been the Junta de Vecinos (est. 1959), AGET, an association of tourism operators to protect heritage (established 1990) and Amanecer el Rapanui (Wake up Easter Island, in Spanish), which is to publish its manifesto in 2001.

Cultural Defense Organization "Mata-Nui a Hotu Matu'a o Kahu-Kahu o Hera", more commonly "Kahu-kahu o Hera", has concerned itself with looking after culturally important plants and the revival of traditional sports and language. Many people who work in the Easter Island language and culture department of the school are associated with Kahu-Kahu o Hera. Fundación Isla de Pasqua, the Easter Island Foundation, have similar ends, focusing on education and language.

Educational, Radio and Television Corporation of the Easter Island Municipal Council is responsible for the running of the Liceo (see above) as well as the annual "Easter Island Week" of cultural display mentioned above. This institution manages "Manukena Radio", an FM service, and "Te Mata o Rapanui", a Television station, both in Rapanui and Spanish. The local radio occupies some hours during the week, transferring to a satellite feed of the Chilean Government "Radio Cooperativa" when local programming is not running. The television station re-broadcasts the government television from Santiago, the Chilean capital, but also has local programming in Rapanui on Saturday and Sunday evenings, with a plan to include some new local shows on Friday evenings, commencing in September of this year. There are two other FM radio stations, one operated by the Chilean Navy ("Vaikava") and one by private Chilean interests ("Chilean Polynesia Radio"). Vaikava switches to Chilean mainland station "Radio Activa" when not broadcasting locally, in Spanish. Chilean Polynesian Radio programming entirely is in Spanish and is owned by The Society for Communications and Culture, Ltd, whose director a local Chilean private medical doctor.

There are a number of local cultural groups, organized and directed by Rapanui, that appear in the annual "Tapati Rapanui" but who also do shows for tourists and are invited perform

around the world. These groups and individuals often produce commercially available cassettes and CDs of their performances that are very popular and available locally, making up much of the programming of Manukena Radio. Their music ranges from the strictly traditional to modern forms of fusion, showing influences from other parts of Polynesia and world music trends. Some of those performing and recording today are Kari-Kari (Mana Corporation), Topatangi, Nga Poki, Matato'a and Polinesia, along with individuals who record, such as Manuto and Mito.

Polinesia was sponsored by the Chilean government to tour Chile, promoting tourism to the island. They have just released a new CD. Topatangi have just left to perform in Chile and record another CD, whilst Matato'a and Kari-Kari have both just returned from invited engagements overseas. Matato'a performed to packed venues in Tahiti during the Heiva in June-July and received a fair bit of press coverage for their shows. Kari-Kari took a troop of eleven performers to the World Festival for Island Cultures held on Jeju Island, Korea, from 19 May to 17 June.

Commencing in 2001, there is a group of young volunteers who devote their Saturdays to restoring *haremoa* (chicken houses), *pipihoreko* (land markers) and *tupa* (observation towers). They attract the help of local entrepreneurs and institutions for support and have not sought so far to form any sort of a named organization. The drive along the coast from Ovahe to Hanga o Hoonu is where they have been working and for anyone who has been along that stretch, it is a pleasant surprise to see something of what that part of the island might have been like – but without people – a century or more ago when it was inhabited.

FUTURE

The most ambitious plan for educational, scientific and cultural development to date is the proposal coming largely from the Municipal Council, but also developing out of wide consultation and technical assistance from UNESCO, called the Educational Village. This comprehensive project intends to include and coordinate existing activities and promote local identity and development in an actual complex of constructions just north of the present settlement, around the site of the Sanatorium, which has not been used for some time. The Village will consist of four development sections (Scientific and Technological, Cultural, Creative and Physical) that center on a fifth, integrative one (Spiritual Development). Proponents of the project realize that their scheme is grandiose and idealist, but often refer to the traditional belief that the human settlement of Rapanui began with a dream – the “Dream of Haumaka” – and that impossible schemes were

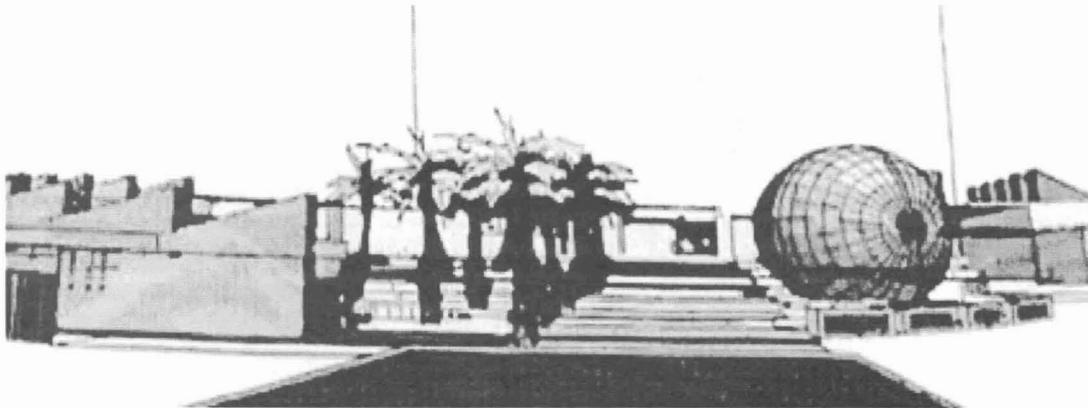
once facts of daily life on the island, as the hundreds of megaliths and their associated constructions bear witness!



Haremoa and Pipihoreko restored by Saturday volunteers.

More immediately, in August-September of 2001, the community is invited to participate in a 5-10 plan called (in Spanish) PEI (*Plan Educacional Institucional*) which is required of all schools in Chile. The Liceo, though, through the Municipality intends to invite experts from Polynesia, as well as Chile, to assist them in thinking about the planning of the education of their children.

Some of the more cynical Rapanui remark that their home is “the island of projects” referring to the constant stream of proposals by government and private institutions and individuals who have a vision of the world that they want to carry out on Easter Island. This desire to bring a preconceived project and implant it on Rapanui is not new, nor an artifact of modern travel and communication. Amongst the press cuttings photocopied in the Rongo-Rongo Public Library is one from the newspaper *La Patria* of 27 May 1868. In that, Domingo S. Donoso, a self-proclaimed Chilean patriot, published his open letter to José Joaquín Pérez, the President of Chile of that time, offering to bring the benefits of civilization and progress to Rapanui, which had just been visited by the Chilean Navy ship *Abtao*. He proposed to do this by establishing a school for both sexes in Spanish, offering modern Catholic education for a trial period of five years. It was to be seventy years before the Chil-



Artist's Plan for Education Village A comprehensive future for Rapanui.

ean government actually did this (1938) in any real sense!

I cannot end this present note without observing that whilst archaeologists have been coming to Rapanui for many years – Paymaster Thompson performed the first excavation at Vinapu with dynamite in 1886! – it is only recently that social anthropology has made its appearance. I would like to count Alfred Métraux in 1934 (and one day of 1935) as an ancestor, but his purposes were very different from mine. I started my research on 1 April 1972 and always find something new, every day. With me on the island at the moment are other social anthropologists, living and working. Javiera Luco is associated with the Chilean government CORFO administration and carries out programs of community action in various areas, Lilian Gonzalez is employed by the Municipality and finds herself advising on household surveys, census operations – there is to be a



Riet Delsing (left), who has just commenced a period of fieldwork for her PhD Thesis on modernity and cultural politics on Rapanui, has done the right thing. With the help of her long-term friends, the Huki family, she had an “Umu Tahu” to commence her fieldwork.

national one in 2002, including Rapanui – and educational planning; indeed, most things that come up in the social area. I believe that she has a colleague or two trained in social anthropology who have worked with her in the past. A fellow student with Javiera Luco, Clemente Hereveri, works in a variety of jobs, advising visiting researchers and offering classes from time to time.

And, continuing her PhD fieldwork, Riet Delsing arrived less than a fortnight ago to research “cultural politics” (how appropriate!) and modernity amongst the present population.

But, the “*matu'a vi'e*” (mother) of all studies is presently underway by Ambar, a consulting firm located in Santiago. They won a CORFO sponsored tender to carry out a comprehensive study of “carrying capacity” of Rapanui. They will be looking at physical carrying capacity (environment) and social carrying capacity in what might be one of the most comprehensive investigations of the place to date. They started earlier this year and are due to report in the next month or so after having

traipsed over most of the island and talked to many of Rapanui's “makers and shakers”. There is considerable official and community interest in the results of the study, especially as it might affect internal management of the large number of settlers arriving from Chile that one sees after every LanChile flight. For a taste of the consultant's capacities, their website is:

<http://www.ambar.cl>

In my next contribution, I expect to give a fuller account of the work that I actually am doing and some of the results that seem to be emerging from my present research.



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